



Ahimsā

Newsletter of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

June 2012 (2556)

The Original Teachings Of the Buddha

THE PĀLI CANON

The Pāli Canon, known as the *Tipiṭaka*, or “Three Baskets”, is divided, as its name indicates, into three parts: (1) the first, the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, is devoted largely to rules for the guidance of the Sangha; (2) the second, the *Sutta Piṭaka*, contains the discourses of the Buddha and several of his distinguished disciples and is devoted particularly to doctrinal and ethical teaching; and (3) the third, the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, which appears to have been compiled later than the other two divisions, contains additional doctrinal and ethical teaching, together with some metaphysical discussions. Though earlier divisions are known to have existed, the *Tipiṭaka* is the only arrangement of the Pāli Canon still in use among Theravādin Buddhists.

These Buddhist scriptures are essentially different from the scriptures of all other religions in that they do not claim divine inspiration or superhuman intervention of any kind, but are, by their own admission, the product of pure human insightfulness.

It is claimed that the great scholar-monk Buddhaghosa, who lived at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries CE, retranslated into Pāli the Sinhalese translation made by Mahinda of the original Pāli Commentaries for extensive parts of the *Tipiṭaka*, which had unfortunately been lost before the time of Buddhaghosa. It is further claimed that these original Pāli texts had been brought from India to Śri Lanka by Mahinda himself, immediately after

the last of the three councils which were held for the purpose of collecting the teachings of the Buddha and fixing, in accordance therewith, the disciplinary rules of the Sangha and the Dhamma taught by the Buddha. Buddhaghosa was also the author of the *Visuddhimagga*, a detailed exposition of the Theravādin tenets as taught at the Mahāvihāra Monastery in Anurādhapura, Śri Lanka. Some of the Pāli Commentaries were also prepared by Dhammapāla in the fifth or sixth century CE.

The first of these councils took place three months after the death of the Buddha and was made up of five hundred Arahats who, with Kassapa as their chosen leader, recited the Precepts and discourses of the Buddha and took the first steps towards a methodical arrangement in two collections: (1) Vinaya — the disciplinary rules for the Sangha; and (2) the Dhamma — the ethical and doctrinal teachings of the Buddha. These collections were thenceforth passed down

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Activities

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship:

- Conducts informal seminars on Buddhism.
- Prepares and distributes free educational material.

Programs

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship sponsors the following programs:

- Instructions in meditation.
- *Dhamma* study groups.
- Retreats (at IMC-USA).

There are no fees for any of the activities or programs offered by the organization. Seminars are designed to present basic information about Buddhism to the general public — anyone may attend. However, study groups and meditation instructions are open to members only.

Retreats last ten days and are coordinated through IMC-USA in Westminster, MD (410-346-7889). Fees are set by IMC-USA. Advance registration is required.

One-on-one discussions about one's individual practice or about Buddhism in general are also available upon request. These discussions are accorded confidential treatment. There is no fee for one-on-one discussions. ■

Purpose of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship is an educational organization whose purpose is to preserve and promote the original teachings of the Buddha in the West.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship actively encourages an ever-deepening process of commitment among Westerners to live a Buddhist way of life in accordance with the original Teachings of the Buddha.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship provides free educational material to those who want to learn about Buddhism and about how to put the Teachings of the Buddha into practice.

The goals of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship are:

1. To provide systematic instruction in the *Dhamma*, based primarily on Pāli sources.
2. To promote practice of the *Dhamma* in daily life.
3. To provide guidance on matters relating to the *Dhamma*, its study, and its practice.
4. To encourage the study of the Pāli language and literature.
5. To maintain close contact with individuals and groups interested in promoting and supporting the foregoing goals. ■

Dhamma Study Groups

An on-going intermediate *Dhamma* study group focusing on the book *Just Seeing* by Cynthia Thatcher is meeting on Sunday mornings at 11:00 AM at the home of Jason Widener (892 East Estates Blvd, West Ashley, SC 29414). E-mail info@charlestonbuddhistfellowship.org or call (843) 321-9190 for the date and time of the next meeting and for directions to Jason's home. The meeting schedule is also posted on the CBF web site: <http://www.charlestonbuddhistfellowship.org>. An introductory *Dhamma* study group starts at 9:00 AM, and there is a meditation session at 10:00 AM. ■

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orally from generation to generation.

Sometime later, grave departures from the disciplinary rules began to develop among members of the Sangha, which was, consequently, becoming split into two factions: (1) an orthodox faction, favoring strict adherence to the established rules and (2) a laxer faction, favoring relaxation of those rules. A second council was held somewhere around 350 BCE, consisting of seven hundred members. At this council, the principles of the orthodox faction prevailed, the deviations from the disciplinary rules were prohibited, and the disciplinary rules and doctrines were again recited in the unaltered form and vindicated. However, the decisions of this council were not accepted by everyone, and the first open schism after the death of the Buddha occurred. Thus began the history of differing and antagonistic schools and sects.

A third council was held at Pāṭaliputta somewhere around 240 BCE, under the patronage of the great Indian ruler Asoka, also known as Dhammāsoka, the grandson of Chandragupta. This council consisted of a thousand members and, like the second council, was convened to settle disagreements among members of the Sangha. At this council, the disciplinary rules and the doctrines were again recited and, for the more conservative Theravādin School, definitively fixed. A fourth council was held around the beginning of the Common Era, but it was completely under the control of the less orthodox Sarvāstavādin School and had no bearing whatsoever on the Pāḷi Canon.

It was probably around this time that the Pāḷi Canon was first put into writing. It is certain, at least, that writing was well known at the time inasmuch as Asoka used it widely in inscribing Buddhist edicts in the Pāḷi language throughout his extended empire. Asoka seems to have been the guiding spirit not only at the third council but also in the immediately subsequent history of Buddhism. It is unlikely that so astute a ruler

would have let slip the advantages gained at the council, with the means available to him for fixing them. And it is quite clear that the Pāḷi Canon was settled from this time onward, as it would probably not have been, unless fixed in writing.

Both the first and second councils are mentioned in portions of the *Tiṭṭaka* itself, but the third council is not. This makes it seem probable that portions of the Pāḷi Canon are at least as old as the second council and that all of its present contents were received at the time of the third. However, most of the Pāḷi Canon is known to be much older, and the majority of it undoubtedly gives us the authentic teachings, if not always the exact words, of the Buddha himself.

The Pāḷi *Piṭakas*, therefore, may safely be accepted as a reliable — of all the Buddhist scriptures thus far known, certainly the most reliable — source of information about the original teachings which the Buddha himself promulgated.

It must be stressed in this connection that the Buddha did not leave an immature, embryonic system, but that his doctrines had been fully developed and clearly stated long before his death. A long and vigorous life had gone into the development and statement of those doctrines. He spent six years of his life — from age 29 to age 35 — engaged in the most active and independent mental investigation ever undertaken, during which time he formulated the fundamentals of his system and shaped the forms of their expression. Then, he devoted the next forty-five years of his life to wide promulgation among people, who were, at first, uninterested, in private and public discussions with the most bitter and most intelligent opponents and in constant teaching of enthusiastic adherents, employing the most logical and exacting methods of instruction and explanation.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF PRIMITIVE BUDDHISM

In approaching the careful examination of the fundamental doctrines of primitive Buddhism, one must constantly bear in mind the environment

in which the system was conceived and developed. Of the principles that had come to be generally or universally accepted by his predecessors and contemporaries, the Buddha flatly denied certain that appeared to him patently false, while he accepted others that appeared to him patently true. He then modified certain others to agree with what he had accepted and yet would not necessitate what he had rejected. Lastly, he made certain original additions which perfected his system. These features include:

1. **God and soul:** One of the most characteristic and fundamental features of original Buddhism is its rejection of the ideas of God and of soul, self, or ego. The Buddha's system was absolutely atheistic, but without the materialistic doctrine which is often associated with atheism and which knows nothing higher than the world of the senses and the slight happiness it can bestow. No other feature of the system is so surprising to those who first encounter Buddhism. In no other doctrine did it differ more from Brahminism and other contemporary systems of philosophy. And, at no other point are several modern schools of Buddhism more at variance with the original. There have always been those who reject God, and there were such persons in the days of the Buddha — blasphemous atheists who mocked the idea of God and found in their atheism license for base indulgence; pessimistic atheists who rejected the idea of God and left mankind helpless and hopeless in the ceaseless world of suffering. But the Buddha was not such as these. He was unquestionably a chaste, earnest, and honest truth-seeker, looking for a way that would enable mankind to conquer lust and escape from suffering. In his search for truth, he had to rely solely upon his own intuition and powers of reason. To him, the idea of God seemed absolutely beyond proof, quite unnecessary in any system of belief, and utterly incapable of explaining either the cause or the cure of suffering.

Therefore, he rejected it, and, with it, every form of worship, every form of sacrifice, and every kind of priestly intervention. He declared that belief in God and in the efficacy of worship was one of the three great delusions that must be entirely abandoned in the first stage of his path (*Sotāpanna*), and one of the four attachments (*upādāna*) that cause all woe and despair.

The Buddha spoke of gods, demons, ghosts, etc. — good and evil spirits of every sort —, and he even retained their Brahmanical names, but he modified the nature of their positions and functions to suit his own views, which did not admit the existence of an Omnipotent Creator or any Supreme Being higher than the perfectly enlightened man. The gods, better called “celestial beings”, are in no sense superior to other forms of life except that they temporarily inhabit more blissful abodes. Such beings are subject to the universal law of dissolution, and, after death, they are succeeded by others, so that there is not one Brahmā or Sakka, but many successive deities so named, and many classes of deities under them. They have no power to affect anyone else's liberation. On the contrary, they must see to their own liberation.

When any being in any of the various realms of existence dies, he must be reborn in some other realm, based upon his *kamma*, for there is no other possibility. If he is reborn in one of the woeful (hell) realms, he is not thereby disbarred from seeking liberation, and, even if he is reborn in a celestial realm as a god, he must, at some time, leave it and seek a still higher state — that of the perfectly enlightened man.

In the Buddha's system, all sentient existence is thus really the same, and any particular temporary being — whether it be as a god, human, animal, ghost, demon, or whatever — is continuously changing, subject to that particular being's own control, inasmuch as any particular rebirth depends

entirely on the volitional actions (*kamma*) of that particular being in a former existence. It must not be supposed, however, that the Buddha envisioned the doctrine of rebirth as a permanently existing soul (*attā*) migrating from one life to another, from one form of existence to another. He emphatically denied that there could be a permanent soul, self, or ego in this ever-changing cycle of sentient existence (*samsāra*). Just as he had rejected the idea of any real God, so, too, he utterly rejected the idea of a permanent soul, self, or ego. Belief in a permanent soul, self, or ego is another of those three primary delusions which has to be abandoned in the first stage of his path (*Sotāpanna*).

There is nothing in the doctrinal part of his system that the Buddha more strenuously maintained or made more essential to the acceptance of his system than the rejection of these two mistaken views.

2. **Impermanence (*anicca*):** The Buddha, in denying the existence of a Creator God and in rejecting the idea of a permanent soul, self, or ego, did not, in so doing, assume the eternal existence of matter. He held that the material universe, like sentient being, was continually changing in its passage through an unending cycle of existences. Indeed, he did not recognize any essential difference between animate and inanimate as to either cause or continuance. He recognized no real *being* but an ever-changing, never-ending process of *becoming*. Through countless “great eons” (*mahākappa*), each consisting itself of eons (*kappa*) upon eons, the destruction and regeneration of the universe (*cakkavāla*) goes on. Slowly, each new universe evolves from its predecessor, and, just as slowly, it disintegrates only to evolve immediately after its demise into another universe that succeeds it.

Kamma and the succession of cause and effect are constant and eternal. But, aside

from these two abstract ideas, in all his teachings, the Buddha reiterated and insisted upon the impermanence and unreality of everything else, mental or material, animate or inanimate. As stated in the *Dhammapada* (verses 277—279):

All compound things (saṃkhārā) are impermanent (anicca); those who realize this through insight-wisdom (paññā) are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to purity.

All compound things have suffering (dukkha) as their nature; those who realize this through insight-wisdom are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to purity.

All states (dhammā) are without self (anattā); those who realize this through insight-wisdom are freed from suffering. This is the path that leads to purity.

Impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and no-self (*anattā*) are the three characteristics of all mental and physical phenomena, and are, consequently, the three great postulates of the Buddha’s system. These three were prescribed as subjects of constant meditation, and were doubtless, from the start, as they still are today, often repeated in melancholy monotone as reminders — “*anicca, dukkha, anattā*”.

3. **The aggregates (*khandha*):** Having denied the existence of an abiding entity in the form of a soul, self, or ego, the Buddha replaced this false notion with an assemblage of five aggregates, as follows:

- Form, matter, materiality, or corporeality (*rūpa*): the collection, or aggregate, of material attributes, twenty-eight of which are enumerated.
- Feeling, or sensation (*vedanā*): the

aggregate of the six classes of sensations received by the six senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind) through contact with a sense object, which are further divided into eighteen classes according to whether any one of them is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

- Perception (*saññā*): the aggregate of the six classes of abstract ideas which correspond with the six classes of sensations; this is the aggregate that recognizes an object.
- Mental formations (*saṃkhāra*): the aggregate of fifty-two attributes of subjective discrimination, or imputation.
- Consciousness (*viññāṇa*): the aggregate of reaction, awareness, or response.

These five aggregates comprise absolutely all that belongs to, or goes to make up, sentient being.

4. **Volitional actions (*kamma*):** The denial of a permanent soul, together with the doctrine of the five aggregates, made it impossible for the Buddha to accept the soul-transmigration theories of the Brahmins without radical modification. Consequently, he proposed a new interpretation of the doctrine of *kamma*. Literally, the word *kamma* means “volitional deeds”, or “volitional actions”. It should be noted that *kamma* never refers to the results of deeds, or actions — technically, the results are called “*vipāka*”.

According to this theory, at the death of any sentient being, a new being, that is, a new assemblage of aggregates (*khandha*), is immediately produced as a result of grasping and clinging (*upādāna*), and the conditions of the existence of the new being are determined by the accumulated *kamma* of its predecessor, which has just passed away. The production of the new assemblage of aggregates is simultaneous with the dissolution of the old, and the new being becomes a continuation of

the old, not by the transmigration of a soul, but by the transference of personal *kamma*.

To Western minds, this doctrine is often difficult to grasp. That the accumulated *kamma* of another being who has entirely ceased to exist should be transferred to an entirely new being who never existed before and with whom it never had any apparent connection whatsoever seems impossible in itself. And yet, this doctrine provides the only reasonable answer as to why there are such stark differences in the characters, personalities, and innate aptitudes of beings. There is no other doctrine, moreover, in the whole Buddhist system, except perhaps the doctrine of *nibbāna*, so distinctly original with the Buddha, and nothing else that has persisted so unchanged through all schools and sects of Buddhism. It is unquestionably the driving force behind Buddhist ethics — the actuating principle in most, if not all, of the conscious, intentional righteousness and benevolence in the lives of the millions of those who have claimed to be Buddhists during more than twenty-five centuries.

5. **Four Noble Truths (*ariya-saccāni*):** The “Four Noble Truths” might be reckoned the essence of Buddhism. They constitute the epitome of the fundamental doctrines of the system, subscribing to which, one is said to have “entered the path”. Those who have not entered the path are said to be “deluded” — *sabbe puthujjanā ummattakā* “all worldlings are deluded”. If, however, they are led, through association with the wise, through hearing the Dhamma, and through the practice of virtue, to see and realize these “Noble Truths”, they will have entered the path. These truths are universal, not bound up with any particular country or any particular epoch. And, in everyone, even in the lowliest, there lies latent the capacity for seeing and realizing these truths and attaining to the highest perfection.

These Four Noble Truths are as follows:

- A. The First Noble Truth, about the universality of suffering (*dukkha*), teaches, in short, that all forms of existence are uncertain, transient, contingent, and devoid of intrinsic self-identity and are, therefore, by their very nature subject to suffering.

The word “*dukkha*” is technically used to express every variety or possible idea of pain, sorrow, suffering, affliction, hardship, grief, unrealized anticipation of pleasure, active disappointment, distress, etc. The Buddha does not deny that there is happiness, enjoyment, and pleasure in life. However, due to their fleeting nature, even these are reckoned as *dukkha*. Consequently, the Buddha enjoins his followers to abandon such pleasures and, instead, to seek the joys of a life devoted to realizing the truth.

- B. The Second Noble Truth, about the origin (*samudaya*) of suffering, teaches that all suffering is rooted in selfish craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*). It further explains the cause of this seeming injustice in nature by teaching that nothing in the world can come into existence without a reason or a cause and that, not only all our latent tendencies, but our whole destiny, all weal and woe, results from causes that can be traced partly in this life and partly in former states of existence.

The Second Noble Truth further teaches us that the future life, with all its weal and woe, must result from the seeds sown in this life and in former lives.

To be more precise, the word “*taṇhā*” is used technically to express every kind of desire or craving possible for a sentient being. It is produced by “feeling” (“sensation”) (*vedanā*), arising

from contact of the six sense bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind) with sense objects. Now, this *taṇhā* is not only the cause of suffering but, even more directly, of life itself, for *taṇhā* causes clinging (*upādāna*), which, as we have already seen, produces, at the death of any sentient being, the new assemblage of aggregates (*khandha*), to which the accumulated *kamma* of the old being is passed on.

It is, in reality, but one of the twelve links in a chain of cause and effect described by the doctrine of “Dependent Origination” (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), by which the Buddha accounted for the arising of universal suffering. This doctrine consists of twelve links arranged in eleven propositions. These propositions are as follows:

- Ignorance (*avijjā*) conditions volitional formations (*saṃkhāra*);
- Volitional formations (*saṃkhāra*) condition consciousness (*viññāṇa*);
- Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) conditions mind-body (*nāma-rūpa*);
- Mind-body (*nāma-rūpa*) conditions the six sense bases (*saḷāyatana*);
- The six sense bases (*saḷāyatana*) condition contact (*phassa*);
- Contact (*phassa*) conditions sensation (*vedanā*);
- Sensation (feeling) (*vedanā*) conditions craving (*taṇhā*);
- Craving (*taṇhā*) conditions clinging (*upādāna*);
- Clinging (attachment) (*upādāna*) conditions becoming (*bhava*);
- Becoming (conditioned existence) (*bhava*) conditions rebirth;
- Rebirth (*jāti*) conditions aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair (*jarāmaraṇam*).

In other words, the ultimate cause of all that is undesirable in life, and even of life itself, is ignorance (*avijjā*). But, the more immediate cause and, for all practical considerations, the more important cause, is craving (*taṇhā*). If, then, craving can be destroyed, release from all suffering might be attained. This leads to the Third Noble Truth.

- C. The Third Noble Truth, or the truth about the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering, shows how, through the destruction of craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*), all suffering will disappear, and liberation from cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) will be attained. This liberation is termed “*nibbāna*”, and it is the goal of Buddhism.

Literally, “*nibbāna*” means “extinction”. This extinction, however, does not mean the extinction of *life*, but of *craving*. It expresses that condition of life wherein an Arahant has utterly extinguished all desire, or craving, of every sort, all ignorance, all defilements, all taints, all fetters, and all attachment to existence in any form whatsoever.

- D. The Fourth Noble Truth shows the way, or the means, by which the cessation of suffering is to be reached. It is the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-aṭṭhangika-magga*) of: (1) Right Understanding; (2) Right Thought; (3) Right Speech; (4) Right Action; (5) Right Livelihood; (6) Right Effort; (7) Right Mindfulness; and (8) Right Concentration.

Each truth requires that it be acted upon in its own particular way — *understanding* suffering, *letting go of* its origin, *realizing* its cessation, and *cultivating* the path. In describing to the five ascetics what his awakening meant, the Buddha spoke of having discovered complete freedom of heart and

mind from the compulsions of craving. He called such freedom “the taste of Dhamma”.

6. **Four Stages of Sainthood (*ariya-puggala*):** Those who persevere on the Noble Eightfold Path will pass successively through the Four Stages of Sainthood, wherein they will be freed from ten “Fetters” (*samyojana*), that is, ten mental obstructions that stand in the way of self-purification and that bind beings to the round of existences (*saṃsāra*):

- Personality belief — the delusion of selfhood;
- Skeptical doubt — doubt about the Buddha, his Dhamma, and his Sangha;
- Attachment to rites and rituals — this includes any kind of a belief in a Supreme Being, together with all charms, rites, ceremonies, or other forms of worship;
- Desire for gratification of the senses — this includes every conceivable form of desire for sensory gratification;
- Ill-will — this includes all forms of anger, hatred, aversion, resentment, and the like, no matter how subtle;
- Craving for fine-material existence — the desire for existence in bodily, material form, whether as a human being on earth or as a celestial being in one of the lower celestial realms;
- Craving for immaterial existence — the desire for existence without bodily, material form, as a celestial being in one of the higher celestial realms;
- Conceit — there are three types of conceit which must be overcome: (a) equality conceit; (b) inferiority conceit; and (c) superiority conceit;
- Restlessness — an unsettled, agitated, or excited state of mind;
- Ignorance — this is synonymous with “delusion” (*moha*), the primary root of all

evil and suffering in the world.

The Four Stages of Sainthood are:

- One who has put an end to the first three Fetters is known as a “Stream-Winner”, or “Stream-Enterer” (*Sotāpanna*); he has entered the stream of liberation, and his destiny has become fixed. He cannot be born in any sphere lower than the human, and if he does not attain full liberation earlier, he is bound to do so within the course of seven lives at the most. One who has reached this stage becomes incapable of committing any of the unwholesome deeds that lead to rebirth in sub-human realms of suffering.
- When, in addition, the next two Fetters are weakened, he becomes a “Once-Returner” (*Sakadāgāmi*); he will not have to endure more than one rebirth in the sensory spheres, which means that, if he fails to reach *nibbāna* in the current life, he is bound to do so in the next birth.
- When all of the first five Fetters, which are known as the “Grosser Fetters”, are completely destroyed, he becomes a “Non-Returner” (*Anāgāmi*); he who will not be born again in the sensory spheres. If he does not gain *nibbāna* before he dies, he will reach it in the next birth, which occurs in the Pure Abodes (*suddhāvāsa*). There, he attains Arahathship and passes straight to *nibbāna* without returning to the sensory planes.
- When all ten Fetters are destroyed, he attains the state of Arahath. He has then realized the Paths and Fruits of the holy life, and, for him, the painful round of rebirth (*samsāra*) has come to an end.

These Four Stages of Sainthood are sometimes separated by intervals, sometimes

they follow immediately after one another, but at each stage the “Fruit” (*phala*), or attainment, follows instantly upon the realization of the Path in the series of thought-moments (*cittakkhaṇa*). When the thought-moment of insight flashes forth, the meditator knows beyond all doubt the nature of his attainment and what, if anything, still needs to be accomplished.

The above points constitute a fair and complete outline of the characteristic and important features of the Buddha’s teaching.

That teaching is eminently practical. The Buddha always refused to enter upon metaphysics or the discussion of topics not relevant to the purpose of his Dhamma, which was to answer, practically, those two burning questions as to the origin of suffering and the way to escape from it. That there was knowledge outside this narrow domain, he readily admitted, and he claimed, as Buddha, to be familiar with it all. But, he claimed that it was utterly useless — everything which was not pertinent to the escape from suffering was a hindrance, and, as such, an evil to be absolutely avoided.

BUDDHIST MORALITY

The most practical part of the Buddha’s teaching is the system of ethics included in the Fourth Noble Truth, for Buddhist ethical precepts most certainly encourage much that is in itself praiseworthy — recognizing, as they do, not only man’s duty of external moral conduct, but also his need of inner purity.

For Buddhist Monks, the training in morality consists of the observance of two hundred twenty-seven rules, while Buddhist Nuns must follow an additional set of rules. The collection of these rules is called the *Pāṭimokkha*, that is, the “Code of Conduct”, or “Disciplinary Rules”, and is a part of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

Lay practitioners observe either five or

eight rules of moral training, the so-called “Five Precepts” (*pañca-sīla*) or “Eight Precepts” (*aṭṭhanga-sīla*). In any kind of spiritual development, aspirants need to establish their practice on moral principles so that they feel self-respect and stability. The training rules provide a guide that they can use for proper behavior in their daily lives, and observance of these rules provides the foundation for the practice of meditation and the attainment of wisdom.

The Five Precepts are:

1. To abstain from taking life;
2. To abstain from taking what is not freely given;
3. To abstain from sexual misconduct;
4. To abstain from false speech;
5. To abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness.

The Eight Precepts include the above five together with three additional precepts; here, the third precept is changed to prohibit any and all types of sexual activity:

1. To abstain from taking life;
2. To abstain from taking what is not freely given;
3. To abstain from all sexual activity;
4. To abstain from false speech;
5. To abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness;
6. To abstain from eating any solid food after noon;
7. To abstain from dancing, singing, music, and unseemly shows; from the use of garlands, perfumes, and unguents; and from things that tend to beautify and adorn;
8. To abstain from high and luxurious beds and seats.

The Five Precepts, the first and most important Buddhist ethical principles, are applicable to all alike. The Eight Precepts, on the

other hand, are not obligatory for lay disciples, and yet, all earnest followers of the Buddha are expected to observe them at certain times, especially on Uposatha Days.

There is also a set of Ten Precepts (*dasa-sīla*). Here, the seventh precept is divided into two, and a tenth precept is added not to accept gold or silver. Only very pious lay persons undertake to observe the Ten Precepts, and, then, only for a specified period of time covered by a special vow. All ten are obligatory for members of the Sangha, and, in their observance, the third precept requires absolute chastity.

There are ten “Mental Defilements” (*kilesa*) that must be vanquished, the first three of which are referred to as the “Three Unwholesome Roots” (*akusalamūlāni*):

1. Greed (*lobha*);
2. Hatred (*dosa*);
3. Delusion (*moha*);
4. Conceit (*māna*);
5. Speculative views (*diṭṭhi*);
6. Skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*);
7. Mental torpor (*thīna*);
8. Restlessness (*uddhacca*);
9. Shamelessness (*ahirika*);
10. Lack of moral dread, or unconscientiousness (*anottappa*).

Likewise, there are four “Taints”, or “Cankers” (*āsava*), that must be destroyed:

1. Wrong views (*diṭṭhāsava*);
2. Sense-desire (*kāmāsava*);
3. Desire for (eternal) existence (*bhavāsava*);
4. Ignorance (*avijjāsava*).

The Taint of wrong views is eliminated through the path of Stream-Entry, the Taint of sense-desire is eliminated through the path of Non-Returning, and the remaining two Taints are eliminated through the path of Arahantship.

The Taints are to be overcome through insight, sense-control, avoidance, wise use

of the necessities of life, etc.

Finally, there are ten “Fetters” (*saṃyojana*) that must be eradicated. These are discussed above under the Four Stages of Sainthood.

In addition to this merely negative morality, which consists of avoiding and/or eliminating unwholesome, corrupting deeds of body, speech, and mind, there are positive aspects which promote the cultivation of meritorious, wholesome deeds, together with states of heart both benevolent and pure.

Among these are the four “Divine Abodes” (*brahmavihāra*). They are also called *appamaññā* “limitless, boundless”, because these thoughts are radiated towards all beings without limit or obstruction. The system of meditation on the Divine Abodes has come to occupy a central position in the field of mental training (*bhāvanā*) in Buddhism. Its exercises include the development of the following four higher sentiments:

1. Loving-kindness (*mettā*);
2. Compassion (*karuṇā*);
3. Sympathetic, or altruistic, joy (*muditā*);
4. Equanimity (*upekkhā*).

From an ethical point of view, these four principles emphasize the moral foundation of every form of religious life and are considered indispensable to spiritual development.

Next, there are the so-called “Seven Jewels” (*satta-ratanāni*), also known as the “Requisites of Enlightenment” (*bodhipakkhiyadhammā*), which is a collection of active virtues that are to be most strenuously sought and guarded:

1. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*): This is equivalent to the seventh step of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Mindfulness, or alertness of mind. It consists of abiding self-possessed and attentive, contemplating according to reality:

- The body (*kāya*);
- Feelings (*vedanā*);
- The state of the mind (*citta*);
- The contents of the mind, or mind objects (*dhamma*);

Seeing all as composite, ever-becoming, impermanent, and subject to decay. It is maintaining ever-ready mental clarity no matter what we are doing, speaking, or thinking and in keeping before our mind the realities of existence, that is, the impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactory nature (*dukkha*), and egolessness (*anattā*) of all forms of existence.

2. Right Effort (*sammappadhāna*): This is equivalent to the sixth step of the Noble Eightfold Path and is the fourfold effort one makes to put forth the energy, to prod the mind, and to struggle:

- To prevent unarisen unwholesome mental states from arising;
- To abandon unwholesome mental states that have already arisen;
- To develop wholesome mental states that have not yet arisen;
- To maintain and perfect wholesome mental states that have already arisen.

In other words, it is the fourfold effort that one makes to overcome and avoid fresh bad actions by body, speech, and mind; and the effort that one makes in developing fresh actions of righteousness, inner peace, and wisdom, and in cultivating them to perfection.

3. Roads to Power (*iddhipāda*): This consists of the following four qualities:

- Concentration of intention accompanied by effort of will;
- Concentration of energy accompanied by

effort of will;

- Concentration of consciousness accompanied by effort of will;
- Concentration of investigation accompanied by effort of will.

4. Spiritual Faculties (*indriya*): This includes the following five factors:

- Faith (*saddhā*);
- Energy (*virīya*);
- Mindfulness (*sati*);
- Concentration (*samādhi*);
- Wisdom (*paññā*).

5. Powers (*bala*): The list of the powers includes the same factors as that of the spiritual faculties given above:

- Faith (*saddhā*);
- Energy (*virīya*);
- Mindfulness (*sati*);
- Concentration (*samādhi*);
- Wisdom (*paññā*).

The powers are distinguished from the spiritual faculties in that they are unshakable by their opposites. They represent, therefore, the aspect of firmness in the spiritual faculties.

6. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhanga*): They are so called because they lead to enlightenment. They are:

- Mindfulness (*sati*);
- Investigation of the Dhamma (*dhamma*);
- Energy (*virīya*);
- Rapture (*pīti*);
- Tranquility (*passaddhi*);
- Concentration (*samādhi*);
- Equanimity (*upekkhā*).

7. The Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-aṭṭhangika-magga*): The Noble Eightfold Path has already been discussed above. It consists of:

- Right Understanding (*sammā-diṭṭhi*);
- Right Thought (*sammā-sankappa*);
- Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*);
- Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*);
- Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*);
- Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*);
- Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*);
- Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*).

Finally, there are the ten “Perfections” (*pāramī* or *pāramitā*), also known as the “Transcendental Virtues”. These are ten qualities leading to Buddhahood. They are:

- Generosity (*dāna*);
- Morality (*sīla*);
- Renunciation (*nekkhamma*);
- Wisdom (*paññā*);
- Energy (*virīya*);
- Patience (*khanti*);
- Truthfulness (*sacca*);
- Determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*);
- Loving-kindness (*mettā*);
- Equanimity (*upekkhā*).

It will be noticed that there is a great deal of repetition in these lists, the same vice or virtue being frequently repeated in a slightly different view or connection. One may find such repetitions tiresome, but they serve to show where emphasis is laid.

Besides these formal divisions of vices to be avoided and virtues to be cultivated, there are many passages scattered throughout the older portions of the Pāli Canon in which these lists occur again and again. Self-restraint; the destruction of greed, hatred, and delusion; the avoidance of moral defilement and laxity; the breaking of all ties that bind one to sense desire; the cultivation of purity, generosity, loving-kindness, patience, determination, wisdom, truthfulness, and equanimity — these are duties that are taught both by precept and example, in story, dialog, parable, and simile throughout the

entire Pāli Canon.

Moreover, it is clearly taught and frequently repeated that an outward, exemplary lifestyle in these respects is not sufficient — one's inner character must be brought into perfect harmony with these principles as well. ■

Charleston Buddhist Fellowship Policies

Commitment:

Buddhism is not concerned about converting or convincing anyone, and no one will be expected to change his/her religious beliefs in order to attend study groups dealing with the life and basic teachings of the Buddha.

Advanced instructions, however, are only available to those who have committed to live a Buddhist way of life. That is to say that they must consider the Theravādin Buddhist path as their primary spiritual practice.

What is expected of an instructor/teacher:

1. An instructor/teacher must be disciplined in morality/ethics (lay teachers must observe either the five or the eight precepts [when participating in or conducting retreats]).
2. An instructor/teacher must be calm and patient, through the practice of meditation.
3. An instructor/teacher must be enthusiastic about the teachings.
4. An instructor/teacher must have a wealth of scriptural knowledge from study.
5. An instructor/teacher must have a thorough knowledge of reality (through realization concerning the impermanent, suffering, and selfless nature of mental and physical phenomena).
6. An instructor/teacher must have concern for the spiritual development of his/her students. This means putting their spiritual welfare first, putting their spiritual growth first, which can

sometimes be very different from allowing them to do what they want. One of the responsibilities of an instructor/teacher is to inform students when they have gone astray and to redirect their efforts back to the path.

7. An instructor/teacher must have skill in instructing students (must be able to cause the students to understand).
8. An instructor/teacher must never become tired of giving an explanation over and over again.

What is expected of students:

1. Students must be impartial, that is, must listen to the teachings with an open mind and not with preconceived ideas or biases.
2. Students must be able to distinguish between correct teachings and paths and false teachings and paths. That is to say, students must take full responsibility for their own spiritual development.
3. Students must strive to improve their understanding of the teachings and to put the teachings into practice.
4. Students must give full attention to the teachings when they are being given by an instructor/teacher or when studying on their own.
5. Students must show respect for the teachings, for the instructor/teacher, and for fellow students (that is to say, they must not be antagonistic towards any of these three, nor must they bring an agenda).
6. Students must follow instructions meticulously, without improvisation or deviation of any kind, especially the instructions concerning meditation.

Disagreements/disputes:

Should disagreements/disputes arise concerning instructions in particular spiritual techniques or disciplines, interpretations of aspects of the teachings of the Buddha, and/or one's own individual practice, the actual words of the

Buddha, as recorded in the Pāli scriptures, along with the Commentaries that accompany and elaborate upon those scriptures and non-canonical works such as the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Milindapañha*, will be the final and binding authority. Personal opinions, personal preferences, interpretations unsupported by scriptural evidence, doctrinal positions of other Buddhist schools or other spiritual traditions, and the like will carry no weight.

Dhamma study groups:

The purpose of the study groups is to explore particular aspects of the teachings of the Buddha, in accordance with the doctrinal positions of the Theravādin School of Buddhism, in a relaxed, open, and uninhibited environment that promotes the free exchange of ideas and information. Questions and comments are encouraged. Study groups must not be confused with instructions: instructions must be followed exactly as expounded in the scriptures, without deviation of any kind, while study groups are unstructured forums.

Meditation instructions:

The mind is essentially a process, a flow of thoughts. The faster and more turbulent the flow is, the harder it is to go below the surface level of awareness into the unconscious realms where our desires and fears, problems and aspirations arise. In *samatha* meditation, we train the mind to concentrate on a single object such as the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. In this way, we can gradually slow down the furious rush of thought, giving increasing self-mastery and, in so doing, provide a sound basis for further development.

Meditation is simple, but it is far from easy — it is a very demanding discipline. We have to be very patient with ourselves and not demand miracles overnight. Whether the results are perceived by us or not, every bit of effort helps. It

takes a lot of hard work to purify one's mind, but through patience, determination, and continuous practice, the day will come when negative responses will no longer arise in our mind.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship provides basic group instructions in mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) and conducts group sittings using this technique. Students are expected to follow the instructions meticulously — right motivation, right posture, right method, and right dedication, both in and out of class:

1. Right motivation: The stronger our motivation is, the more likely we are to succeed. When we start a meditation session, it is important to understand why we are doing it and to generate a positive motivation toward the learning process. We should choose to practice meditation — we should not practice it under pressure from others.
2. Right posture: This means sitting, standing, or walking to and fro (if engaged in walking meditation), keeping the back perfectly straight at all times. Lying down may also be used as a meditation position, but only if one is disabled or if one is sick. Unless one is hospitalized or bed-ridden for some reason, one should not meditate in one's bed or any other place where one normally rests or goes to sleep.
3. Right method: The instructions given by the Buddha must be followed without modification of any kind. This means no changes should be made based upon personal preferences or based upon what is taught by other Buddhist schools or other spiritual traditions.
4. Right dedication: We always complete our meditation session by dedicating the positive energy that has been generated to all sentient beings, that they may be happy, that they may be well, that no harm may come to them, that they may cause harm to no one, that they may achieve enlightenment.

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship takes no responsibility for those who choose to ignore the instructions or who choose to explore other types

of meditation or other meditation topics on their own. Moreover, the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship reserves the right to refuse to give instructions to those who violate the above policies/rules.

Instructions and/or guidance on other meditation topics and more advanced meditation techniques will be provided on an individual basis to those who have successfully completed at least one ten-day retreat at IMC-USA (see above for details). ■

Behavioral Guidelines Regarding the Dhamma

Countless and lasting benefits are received from *Dhamma* practice. Certain basic modes of behavior express our gratitude for these benefits. As our awareness of the sacred nature of all objects and relationships connected to the *Dhamma* increases, various rules of behavior are integrated into a natural and unselfconscious way of being. Until that time, the following observances are offered as guidelines:

1. Shoes are taken off before entering a shrine room or meditation hall.
2. The bottoms of the feet are never shown to an altar, a teacher, a text, or any sacred object. Thus, it is better not to stretch one's legs out in a shrine room during a teaching, a meditation, or an interview.
3. Sacred images and texts are always put in high places and never put on the floor. When carrying a text or an object of the *Dhamma*, it is held up, not hanging down at arm's length. One does not step over sacred texts or other sacred objects or images. One does not write in or on sacred texts or deface them in any way whatsoever.
4. Candles should not be blown out on a shrine; they should be snuffed out or pinched out.
5. Three prostrations may be done before sitting down to meditate or before an interview or a teaching, but prostrations are never done when leaving a shrine room or an interview.
6. When approaching spiritual teachers for any reason, one bows down as low as possible and kneels before them if their chair is low.
7. Whenever we are seated and a spiritual teacher walks into the room or walks past us, we should stand up out of respect until he or she has motioned to us to sit down.
8. One should always arrive early for a teaching or an interview.
9. We should wear clothes that show respect for the *Dhamma*. This generally means long pants for men and long skirts or tunics and slacks for women.
10. There should be no drinking of alcohol, smoking, or drugs of any kind in the presence of a spiritual teacher or before an interview, teaching, or meditation. There should be no food or drink in a shrine room or meditation hall.
11. Shrine rooms and meditation halls are sacred places and should be used for spiritual practices only. They should not be used to socialize or to hold conversations.
12. Other religions or spiritual traditions should not be mentioned or discussed or compared when attending teachings, including *Dhamma* study groups. It is, however, appropriate to discuss and ask questions about the *Dhamma* or about one's own *Dhamma* practice.
13. We should always maintain silence if someone is meditating. We should also avoid playing music or making any kind of distracting noise if some is meditating. ■

Charleston Buddhist Fellowship

Membership

The Charleston Buddhist Fellowship encourages sincere practitioners to become members and to become active in promoting and supporting the activities of the organization. Members receive mailings and the right to participate in programs sponsored by the organization. Members also receive free copies of all educational material produced by the organization. Though there are absolutely no dues or other fees required to become a member of the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship, voluntary contributions are accepted. These donations help support the on-going activities of the organization and help cover operating expenses such as producing, printing, and mailing notices of events, cost of preparing and producing educational material, etc. ■

Membership Form:

Name:

Address:

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Home phone:

E-mail:

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Return forms to: Charleston Buddhist Fellowship ♦ 940 Rutledge Avenue ♦ Charleston, SC 29403-3206

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